



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 4
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April 15, 2013

Dan Kimball
Superintendent
Everglades National Park
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, FL 33034-6733

SUBJECT: Draft General Management Plan/East Everglades Wilderness Study/
Environmental Impact Statement
CEQ Number: 20130047

Dear Mr. Kimball:

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the subject Draft General Management Plan/East Everglades Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement. The National Park Service (NPS) is the lead federal agency for the proposed action.

Everglades National Park was dedicated in 1947 with 460,000 acres. As a result of various boundary additions, the park now encompasses 1,509,000 acres, including the largest legislated wilderness area (1,296,500 acres) east of the Rocky Mountains.

The last comprehensive effort for Everglades National Park was completed in 1979. Much has occurred since then—patterns and types of visitor use have changed, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan was approved, and in 1989 the East Everglades Addition (109,600 acres) was added to restore Northeast Shark River Slough and enhance freshwater flows from the northern end of the park to Florida Bay. Recent studies have enhanced the National Park Service's understanding of resources, resource threats, and visitor use in the national park. This general management plan will provide updated management direction for the entire national park, including the East Everglades Addition.

This document presents and analyzes four alternative ways of managing Everglades National Park for the next 20 or more years—alternative 1 (no action), the NPS preferred alternative, alternative 2, and alternative 4.

Alternative 1 (no action) provides a baseline for evaluating changes and impacts of the three action alternatives. No wilderness is proposed for the East Everglades Addition in alternative 1.

The NPS preferred alternative would support restoration of natural systems while providing improved opportunities for quality visitor experiences. It proposes about 80,100 acres for designation as wilderness and about 9,900 acres for designation as potential wilderness within the East Everglades Addition.

Alternative 2 would strive to maintain and enhance visitor opportunities and protect natural systems while preserving many traditional routes and ways of visitor access. It proposes 39,500 acres for designation as wilderness within the East Everglades Addition. Alternative 2 would provide a high level of support for protecting natural systems while improving opportunities for certain types of visitor activities.

Alternative 4 would eliminate commercial airboat tours within the park. It proposes 42,700 acres for designation as wilderness and 59,400 acres for designation as potential wilderness within the East Everglades Addition.

All four alternatives, including the no action alternative, would enhance Flamingo Concession Services and facilities, but at a reduced level from what was described in the 2008 Commercial Services Plan. All of the action alternatives include construction of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas visitor facility at Gulf Coast, and each of these three alternatives would provide different new visitor opportunities.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AND THE ACTION ALTERNATIVES (PREFERRED, ALTERNATIVE 2, AND ALTERNATIVE 4)

There are several programs and processes that would be implemented in the action alternatives (preferred, alternative 2, and alternative 4). These programs are described below.

An adaptive management program would be developed to evaluate the success of management actions in achieving desired resource and visitor use conditions and modify management strategies as needed to improve success in achieving desired conditions.

An Everglades National Park Advisory Committee, composed of diverse stakeholders would be established to help park managers consider various perspectives on issues such as management of fisheries, access and visitor use (particularly the management of boating in shallow marine waters), and protection of endangered species during adaptive implementation of the approved management plan.

A user capacity program would be implemented to assist in managing the levels, types, and patterns of visitor use to preserve park resources and quality of the visitor experience. Components would include: (1) establish desired conditions for various areas of the park through management zoning, (2) identify indicators to monitor to determine whether desired conditions are being met, (3) identify standards (limits of acceptable change) for the indicators, (4) monitor

indicators to determine if there are disturbing trends or if standards are being exceeded, and (5) take management action to maintain or restore desired conditions.

A comprehensive cultural resource management program would be established, focusing on efforts to inventory, document, and protect all types of cultural resources; regularly monitor archeological sites and other historic properties to assess resource conditions and inform long-term treatment strategies; interpret selected cultural sites for the public; and better interpret and protect ethnographic resources in consultation with associated American Indian tribes and others traditionally associated with the park.

A strong natural resource management program would be developed to support implementation of desired conditions described in this general management plan, implement natural resource components of this plan, and contribute to the adaptive management and user capacity components of this plan.

A boater education permit program would be established to promote shared stewardship of marine resources, including shallow sea bottom areas, seagrasses, and wildlife. Operators of motorboats and non-motorized boats (including paddled craft) would complete a mandatory education program to obtain a permit to operate vessels in the park. Program information would be tailored to the type of craft and/or type of trip and would be widely available at the park; on the Internet; in gateway communities, marinas, hotels; and from guides; etc.

EPA's COMMENTS

Regarding **water quality issues**, specifically TMDLs, numeric nutrient criteria (NNC), impaired waters with causes, EPA offers the following comments:

Page 171 has a discussion on phosphorus content at discharge structures rising over the years, however, there was no mention of the new/emerging criteria (water quality standards). Basically, on 11/30/12, EPA approved the State's numeric nutrient criteria for, streams, lakes, springs and south Florida estuaries and coastal waters. On the same day, the EPA proposed criteria for the remaining estuaries, coastal waters, and south Florida inland flowing waters, and also re-proposed criteria for flowing waters outside of south Florida (applicable to waterways that may meet the definition at 62-302.200(36)(a) or (b) F.A.C.).

In accordance with the requirements of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has completed the review of the revised rules adopted by the State of Florida. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has concluded that those changes which were determined to be water quality standards are approved.

Criteria Derivation

Springs

For spring vents, FDEP adopted a nitrate-nitrite criterion. The spring vent nitrate-nitrite criterion is based on a stressor-response relationship between nitrate-nitrite and the presence of

nuisance algal mats, with the criterion established at a concentration that would prevent nuisance mats from occurring.

Streams

For stream criteria, FDEP has developed reference-based nitrogen and phosphorus thresholds, in conjunction with biological components. This biological information augments the reference-based nutrient thresholds, and this integrated approach provides a strong package for protecting streams that is biologically responsive. The specific concentration values associated with the nitrogen and phosphorus thresholds vary depending upon which area of the state, out of a total of five areas that the water body is located within.

Lakes

FDEP has classified lakes into three categories: colored lakes, clear lakes with high alkalinity and clear lakes with low alkalinity. The lakes criteria were based on a stressor-response relationship between total nitrogen and total phosphorus (TN and TP) and phytoplankton response (chlorophyll a).

Estuaries

Estuary-specific numeric interpretations of the narrative criteria were derived for estuaries along the South and Southwest Coast. These include Tampa Bay, Clearwater Harbor, Sarasota Bay, Charlotte Harbor, Clam Bay and South Florida marine waters from the Ten Thousand Islands around to Biscayne Bay including Florida Bay and the Florida Keys. FDEP adopted these criteria to protect recreation and a healthy, well-balanced population of fish and wildlife.

Downstream Protection

Protection of downstream waters is required in FDEP's nutrient Rule by the statement, "The loading of nutrients from a water body shall be limited as necessary to provide for the attainment and maintenance of water quality standards in downstream waters." FDEP will implement this narrative by using models to allocate to upstream watersheds when establishing the TMDL for the downstream water body; requiring dischargers, at the time of permit issuance, to provide reasonable assurance that their effluent does not cause or contribute to nutrient impairments in the receiving water body and downstream water bodies; and identifying increasing trends in nutrient concentrations in all waters, including downstream waters, during the assessment cycle.

The FDEP Rule also includes an evaluation of trends to ensure that conditions are not increasing in a manner that could result in future impairment downstream.

FDEP's Rule provides processes that will serve to ensure the attainment and maintenance of downstream waters by requiring nutrient control measures not only in cases where nutrient impairment has already been documented, but also in cases where nutrient standards are currently met in downstream waters, but maintaining compliance with those nutrient standards is threatened as documented by water quality trends.

Site-Specific Alternative Criteria

FDEP's Rule also includes provisions outlining the process for the development of site-specific alternative criteria or SSAC for nutrients. This process provides a predictable approach to developing nutrient SSAC. The Rule language provides clear expectations on the water quality and biological data needed to characterize existing nutrient concentrations and aquatic health.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) should include discussions of the State's numeric nutrient criteria for, streams, lakes, springs and south Florida estuaries and coastal waters.

Cumulative TMDLs by Pollutant Florida, Everglades Watershed

This chart includes TMDLs since October 1, 1995.

<u>Pollutant</u>	<u>Number of TMDLs Completed</u>	<u>Number of Causes of Impairment Addressed</u>
Fecal Coliform	16	16
Nitrogen, Total	10	15
Phosphorus, Total	10	15
Turbidity	6	6
Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD)	5	8
Total Suspended Solids (TSS)	4	4
Fecal	3	3

Total: 54 TMDLs; 67 Causes of Impairment

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) should include discussions of the 54 TMDLs that have been approved/established for the Everglades.

Regarding **Tribal issues**: EPA encourages consultation with the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida at all levels of decision-making. The EPA works closely with both Tribes on Everglades matters and is committed to working with other federal partners to prioritize the Tribes' water quality and water management concerns.

In the spirit of collaboration and technical assistance the EPA encourages NPS to consider some **sustainability concepts** which could be incorporated in the management plan.

Green Building

Green building is the practice of creating structures and using processes that are environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout a building's life-cycle from design to, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation and deconstruction. This practice expands and complements the classical building design concerns of economy, utility, durability, and comfort. Green building is also known as a sustainable or high performance building.

Green buildings are designed to reduce the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by:

- Efficiently using energy, water, and other resources
- Protecting occupant health and improving employee productivity
- Reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation

For example, green buildings may incorporate sustainable materials in their construction (e.g., reused, recycled-content, or made from renewable resources); create healthy indoor environments with minimal pollutants (e.g., reduced product emissions); and/or feature landscaping that reduces water usage (e.g., by using native plants that survive without extra watering).

Green Parking

Green parking refers to several techniques that when applied together reduce the contribution of parking lots to total impervious cover. From a storm water perspective, green parking techniques applied in the right combination can dramatically reduce impervious cover and, consequently, reduce the amount of storm water runoff. Green parking lot techniques include: setting minimums of permanent parking spaces; minimizing the dimensions of parking lot spaces; utilizing alternative pavers in overflow parking areas; using bioretention areas to treat storm water; encouraging shared parking.

Green parking lots can dramatically reduce the creation of new impervious cover. How much is reduced depends on the combination of techniques used to achieve the greenest parking. While the pollutant removal rates of bioretention areas have not been directly measured, their capability is considered comparable to a dry swale, which removes 91 percent of total suspended solids, 67 percent of total phosphorous, 92 percent of total nitrogen, and 80-90 percent of metals (Claytor and Schueler, 1996).

Based on the DEIS, we agree with NPS that The NPS Preferred Alternative appears to be the best approach. We rate this document LO (Lack of Objections). However, as noted above, additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the FEIS.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the proposed action. Please contact Ken Clark of my staff at (404) 562- 8282 if you have any questions or want to discuss our comments further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mueller", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Heinz J. Mueller, Chief
NEPA Program Office
EPA, Region 4